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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8347th meeting
Tuesday, 11 September 2018, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Ipo
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Ms. Guadey
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Mr. Radomski
	Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 11.05 a.m.

Tribute to the victims of the attacks of 11 September 2001

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

We sit here today on 11 September. Seventeen years after the attacks of 11 September 2001, it hurts us as much today is it did on the day it happened. I was at the 9/11 memorial ceremony this morning. They started reading the names. As we start this Security Council meeting, they are still reading the names of those who were lost. We lost thousands of people on that day. We lost mothers and fathers. We lost sisters and brothers. We lost sons and daughters. We lost friends. We saw heroism at its best. We saw friends helping friends. We saw those helping the disabled. We saw first responders go back into burning buildings, knowing that they might not come back out. It was the true testament of courage, sacrifice and patriotism.

But that day taught us a lot of lessons. It taught us the lesson that we can never let our guard down. It taught us the lesson that evil exists. And it taught us the lesson that we should never stop trying for peace and security in this world. And so, when we look at Americans and we see the United States of America that stands today, we see that we fight harder, we defend more passionately and we love more strongly because we know what pain and sacrifice are. But we also know that we will never forget.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I ask members of the Council to stand and observe a minute of silence.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are marking a sad date today, and we have just come from memorializing the unfortunate victims who died in that terrible tragedy. Across the street from the Russian Mission in New York are a police station and a fire station whose employees took part in rescuing people on 11 September 2001. Today I went up to the fire station chief to offer my sympathy and appreciation for the heroism of the firefighters and police who helped in that rescue.

I also want to remind the Council that on that day of 11 September, President Putin was the first of the foreign leaders who called President George W. Bush to express his condolences, support and readiness to help combat the monstrous phenomenon that we were witnessing. Russia is familiar with international terrorism, and not merely by reputation, unfortunately. We continue to reach out to every country and to believe that it is our duty to fight this evil together, as our proposal to create a genuinely broad international coalition to combat international terrorism testifies.

Seeing the interest that has been shown in the third summit of the Astana format guarantor countries, held in Tehran on 7 September, we have decided to speak about its main conclusions in the forum of the Security Council. The meeting was a major milestone on the road to the restoration of peace and the establishment of a durable long-term settlement in the Syrian Arab Republic. Together with our Iranian and Turkish counterparts, we have circulated the concluding joint statement as an official document of the Security Council. The three Presidents' addresses to the summit, and their press conference and joint statement, send a clear message to the international community that Russia, Iran and Turkey are ready to do everything in their power to continue to contribute to the final destruction of terrorism on Syrian soil, putting an end to civilian suffering and establishing post-conflict reconstruction and real progress with the political process, enabling the Syrians themselves to determine their future. It is also important that the guarantor countries reaffirmed their commitment to Syria's sovereignty, unity, political independence and

territorial integrity as the basis for all their actions in the context of this crisis.

There was a substantive discussion in Tehran of the situation in Idlib, where tens of thousands of militants from Jabhat Al-Nusra, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and other groups that the Security Council has declared outlawed as terrorists are concentrated. It was with that in mind that Russia, Iran and Turkey expressed their shared determination to completely eliminate these remnants of terrorism all over Syria that are threatening the security of the region, while giving maximum attention to preventing civilian casualties. We should not pass up the chance of reconciliation for those who are ready for dialogue, and we hope that those in Idlib will hear that call. We are demanding that the armed groups stop shelling peaceful towns and villages, something that is going on regularly. Just the other day, nine people, including children, were killed, and dozens injured in a rocket and mortar attack on the town of Muhradah in northern Hamah province, and three people died when several rocket missiles were fired at the neighbouring town of Al-Suqaylabiyah.

The joint statement noted the urgent need to dissociate the members of the armed opposition that have chosen the path of a political settlement from the terrorists. In the view of the summit participants that separation will be decisive in ensuring the safety of the civilian population. That is why those in Tehran have appealed to all the members of the international community with the ability to influence the armed groups in Idlib to cooperate in separating them from the terrorists. At the same time, we cannot allow the terrorists to indefinitely hold hundreds of thousands of civilians in Idlib hostage and use them as human shields. As every United Nations resolution stipulates, there can be no coexisting with terrorists, and it is impermissible to let them off the hook. After all, these are all offshoots and varieties of the same Al-Qaida that we all launched a joint fight against in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and from which we can expect the worst possible brutalities anywhere in the world. We are remembering those tragic events this very day.

The Tehran summit again affirmed the fact that there can be no alternative to a political settlement in Syria. We hope that the three guarantor countries' message will be heard by all. That position takes on special significance today against a backdrop of threats to resort to military intervention in Syria and strike Government facilities in the guise of a response to claims of Damascus's use of toxic substances and allegations that President Al-Assad has ordered the use of chlorine. The Syrian authorities are not about to do this. They have no chemical weapons. We are once again asking the Council to listen: from a military point of view there is no justification for the use of chemical weapons by Damascus, while both militarily and politically it would be damaging insofar as it would be an invitation to the Western troika to strike at Syria, which they are threatening to do on that same pretext of the use of chemical weapons. Meanwhile, there is a strong possibility of provocations from those of Damascus's opponents who are counting on the forceful support of their foreign patrons, and we have incontrovertible evidence of preparations for that.

The third Astana summit contrasted such dangerous and vain military attempts with the work of activating a political process led and implemented by the Syrians themselves, without dictation or pressure from outside. In accordance with instructions from their three Presidents, high representatives of Russia, Iran and Turkey were to hold consultations on 10 and 11 September with Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, with the goal of establishing the most representative possible constitutional committee in Geneva as soon as possible, capable of reflecting the interests and aspirations of every Syrian and of beginning work in accordance with the decisions of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue, held in Sochi on 30 January, and with resolution 2254 (2015).

Much attention in Tehran was focused on the work of post-conflict reconstruction in the Syrian Arab Republic. The conditions are ripe. The people's acute humanitarian needs are enormous, from food problems and humanitarian mine clearance to the restoration of basic infrastructure facilities. But none of this should involve the political blackmail that many Western capitals openly invoke. Promises of bread and butter in exchange for political regime change in Damascus do no honour to those who talk about Syria's humanitarian problems at donor conferences but obstruct the provision of genuine assistance to the Syrian people and maintain unilateral sanctions.

An important item on the summit's agenda was the three guarantor countries' discussion of the issues related to facilitating the mass return of Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons to their

original homes. As we know, the Syrian Government has given the relevant security guarantees, and there is great interest in this on the part of Syria's neighbours. We definitely think that at a suitable point a major international conference, to be developed by Russia, Iran and Turkey, will be convened for the purpose of making a significant contribution to that task.

The unanimous acceptance of the effectiveness of and need for the Astana format was one of the most results of the Tehran summit. Russia, Iran and Turkey have shown — not in words but in deed — that we can compromise on the most difficult situations when required. Our interaction has enabled us to stop large-scale violence in Syria, provide for long-term stabilization, create the conditions necessary for a genuine start to the settlement process, and achieve a political transformation that would benefit all Syrians. In Tehran, it was stated very clearly that work of that kind will continue and cover the broadest possible range of issues in Syria. The next summit will be held in Russia.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): I thank you personally, Madam President, for your impressive words in commemoration of the victims of 9/11. The Kingdom of the Netherlands has stood and will stand in full solidarity with the United States. Our thoughts are with all those who lost loved ones on that terrible day 17 years ago.

Let me thank the Russian delegation for providing us with an update on the results of the third trilateral summit of Astana guarantors in Tehran. I will focus on three points: first, the risk of rapid escalation; secondly, the responsibility of the Astana guarantors; and, thirdly, the need to protect civilians.

First, the risk of rapid escalation involving regional and international players is great. The potential consequences of an escalation of violence are horrific. In our view, there is an urgent need for a real shift of focus towards diplomacy at the negotiating table, with the goal of bringing a non-military solution closer. Only a political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2016), can end the conflict in a sustainable and peaceful manner.

Secondly, with regard to the responsibility of the Astana guarantors and the need for a complete cessation of hostilities, frankly speaking the Kingdom of the Netherlands is disappointed with the results of the Tehran summit. It is our view that it is the responsibility of the Astana guarantors to uphold the ceasefire and de-escalation arrangements to which they have previously agreed, and to protect civilians as a matter of priority. During the Tehran summit, the Astana guarantors reiterated their pledge to seek a negotiated solution to Syria's seven-year conflict, but in practice we see that two of the three guarantors are instead getting ready for a full-scale military offensive in Idlib. On the day of the summit and over the weekend, we saw escalation instead of de-escalation. It is a continuation of the well-known pattern of fighting in de-escalation zones that reminds us of eastern Ghouta and Dar'a earlier this year.

If the Russian Federation and Iran are serious about a non-military solution and de-escalation, they need to cease further military build-up around Idlib and stop the aerial attacks immediately. It is crucial that the de-escalation zone be upheld. There needs to be an immediate and complete ceasefire. We share Turkish concerns about escalating violence in Idlib and an imminent humanitarian catastrophe. Turkey already hosts 3.5 million Syrian refugees. The Kingdom of the Netherlands appreciates and respects that and fully shares Turkish concerns.

Thirdly, with regard to the urgent need for the protection of civilians who encounter terrorism, in our view all parties involved should exercise utmost restraint, put the protection of civilians first and allow unhindered humanitarian access. Civilians are not the ones who should leave Idlib. We are sceptical about the concept of corridors or protected evacuation routes, not in the least because of the enormous number of civilians in Idlib. For example, if medical evacuations are attempted, they must be in line with the minimum standards for humanitarian evacuations that have been circulated by the United Nations. Parties need to uphold international humanitarian law throughout Syria, and in particular in Idlib.

Any measure to counter terrorism must comply with obligations under international law, in particular human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. Combating terrorism is no excuse for attacking without distinction or proportionality. Recent peaceful protests by the civilian population in Idlib against violence and extremism show that Idlib is not a hotbed of terrorism. That also became very clear during the Arria Formula meeting last Friday, at which Bassma Kodmani stated that civilians are a strong asset in countering terrorism. As Special Envoy De

Mistura stated last Friday, there must be — and there is — another way than all-out military escalation.

There are alternatives. We can and should prevent a terrible tragedy and, at the same time, allow the issue of Security Council-designated terrorist groups to be addressed. We call on all actors to use their influence on the warring parties in Idlib to put the protection of civilians first. If separating Al-Nusra from armed groups is the central issue in Idlib, then we need to listen to the Special Envoy on how to operationalize it. If the Astana guarantors want international support for their efforts in that regard, then guarantors must also be transparent about what exactly they are planning. I repeat, any plan must put the protection of civilians first.

Let me also stress the importance of unimpeded United Nations humanitarian aid and the protection of hospitals, schools and humanitarian aid workers. We are shocked by reports of White Helmets being targeted once again over the weekend in so-called double-tap strikes. Over the weekend, three hospitals were struck. Two Syrian civil defence centres and an ambulance system were hit. Their coordinates were well known and deconfliction had taken place. Such developments and actions are of extreme concern to us.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands will continue its efforts to achieve accountability for such crimes. Impunity cannot prevail. In our view, referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court remains the best option.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of France, allow me to begin by conveying the solidarity of my country and all French citizens with our American friends and the United States, as a whole, as we remember the tragedy that took place on 11 September 2001. I also hope that the spirit of unity that prevailed on 9/11, which I myself felt very deeply as I was in the United States at the time, could provide genuine inspiration for our work.

I thank the American presidency of the Council and Russia for convening today's meeting as an extension of the meetings held late last week. My statement will be relatively brief. I will focus on two priority issues that France believes are complementary and inextricably linked: first, preventing a military offensive in Idlib, which would open one of the bloodiest chapters of the Syrian tragedy and lead to dire consequences; and, secondly, creating genuine momentum for a political settlement to the conflict. We all know that the path is an extremely difficult one, but we also believe that a solution is possible.

Despite calls from the international community, the number of which is unprecedented in recent history, the Tehran meeting did not lead to a firm commitment on the part of Russia and Iran to preserving the de-escalation that they themselves had guaranteed. In the wake of the Tehran summit, millions of Syrians in Idlib remain uncertain that their lives will be spared. On the contrary, in the wake of the Tehran summit the Russian air force resumed its aerial bombardment in support of the regime.

Let us be clear: our common priority continues to be combating terrorism, and it could, and should, bring us together. As Council members are aware, France is fully playing its part in that regard. But that fight cannot justify indiscriminate attacks against civilians or serious violations of international humanitarian law. Such attacks constitute a humanitarian tragedy as well as a strategic absurdity, in that they fuel the very terrorism they purport to combat. Hence, Syria has become the pre-eminent breeding ground for terrorism. Among the 3 million people who are being held hostage in Idlib — a number greater than the population of Paris — many of them took to the streets peacefully last week to say how unfairly they are being targeted, to express their rejection of terrorism and to recall their legitimate aspirations for the rule of law in Syria. Those massive demonstrations, whose images we have seen, show the faces behind the numbers.

We know — and it was extensively detailed last Friday (see S/PV.8345) — how a major offensive in Idlib would have disastrous consequences for the country and the region, in humanitarian, security and political terms.

On the humanitarian front, several tens of thousands of people have begun to reach northern Idlib to flee the bombing. They are only the first in what could be a new and unprecedented migration crisis, of which Turkey, which already hosts nearly 15 per cent of the Syrian population who fled the regime's massacres since 2011, will be the first to be impacted. We must do everything possible to ensure safe, full and unhindered humanitarian access to the entire population in need. In that regard, I commend the heroic role being played by the White Helmets in going to the aid of civilians under bombardment, at the risk of their own lives and in the midst of the ruins and rubble.

France also reiterates that it will not tolerate any new use of chemical weapons. Along with our close partners, we stand ready to respond in the event of a chemical attack. Our most senior officials have unambiguously spoken on that point.

Maintaining the ceasefire and protecting civilians, including humanitarian personnel, must be the first priority for actors on the ground. That is why Russia must become involved. I welcome the involvement of the United Nations in deterring escalation and preparing to deal with it in the event. We must do everything possible to prevent civilians from being targeted. We therefore have a collective responsibility to leave no stone unturned — to turn off our automatic pilot — so as to find areas of agreement and together explore every possible solution, including the most creative, to avoid military escalation and open up the way for a political settlement. Such a solution, if we succeed in coming together, could be at hand tomorrow. That is why we need to allow time for dialogue so that solutions emerge. That is our first priority today. At the moment, the guarantors' task is to avert the irreversible and to take the time needed to find an agreement by working together with us all.

Let us be clear as well that the situation in Idlib is a further illustration, were there a need for one, of three facts that everyone must clearly bear in mind: Syria is in not a country that is returning to normalcy, quite the opposite is true; the Syrian tragedy is not behind us, indeed the worst could be ahead in the event of a major offensive in Idlib; and the total military retaking of Idlib, in which the regime and its supporters are engaged, will not make it possible to stabilize the country and will produce only more chaos, which is to say that the same causes produce the same effects. Therefore, and I say it again, the only real and lasting way out of the conflict is a negotiated political solution that is acceptable to all. There is no solution other than recourse to the demanding path of negotiation.

And therefore our values, interests and realpolitik demand that we come together to fully and collectively support the efforts of the United Nations Special Envoy to relaunch the Geneva process. That includes the establishment of a constitutional committee as soon as possible, which could be the key to at last clearing the path to a political solution. Its work could begin without delay, in a truly independent way, under the auspices of the United Nations.

Resolution 2254 (2015) provides the elements for a broader political solution, namely, a constitution, free and transparent elections in which all Syrians, including displaced persons and refugees, can vote, and the establishment of a safe, secure and neutral environment, guaranteed by confidence-building measures. We are two weeks away from the commencement of the general debate at the General Assembly, where our leaders will all be gathered. Let us take advantage of that opportunity before us.

The road map we are proposing is clear: strong commitment by the parties to a ceasefire in order to spare the civilian population of Idlib; speeding up the political process, with the first step being collective support for the launch of the work of a constitutional committee; and the joining together by the members of the Security Council in support of a constructive political agenda at the General Assembly to force destiny and seize a concerted, peaceful resolution to the conflict. The reconstruction of Syria is conceivable only on that basis — when an irreversible, credible and inclusive political transition gets under way.

I say again to Russia that the ball is in its court. It should assume clear and firm commitments to avoid the irreparable in Idlib and reassure the civilians there, afford more time for dialogue to identify a solution for Idlib, and come together with us to chart the challenging course towards peace in Syria. France stands ready to contribute to that end without losing a minute. Let us all get to work.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): Today is a special day for remembering. I would first of all like to convey my profound condolences for the victims of the 9/11 incident, and to the families our sympathy. The international community stands firmly together in our battle against terrorism.

I thank you, Madam, President for convening this meeting. I also wish to thank Ambassador Nebenzia for his briefing.

China welcomes the summit of the leaders of Russia, Turkey and Iran that took place on 7 September and culminated in a joint statement. China commends the tireless efforts of the three countries to push for a diplomatic solution to the Syrian issue. The Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Syra, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, is currently stepping up his engagement with the parties concerned with regard to the establishment of a Syrian constitutional committee. We believe

that those developments will play and important and positive role in improving the situation in the Syrian town of Idlib and in advancing a political settlement of the Syrian question.

There is no alternative to a political settlement for Syria to achieve peace and stability. All parties should abide by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and other universally recognized, basic norms of international relations; fully respect Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity; and avoid the use or threat of use of force as a reflex.

The international community should join forces to continue its fight against terrorism and consolidate the counter-terrorism achievements made thus far. All parties should take measures to spare innocent civilians any harm. We call on the international community to increase humanitarian assistance to Syria. The international community should continue to leverage the role of the United Nations as the primary mediator, support the Geneva talks and the Astana process in playing their due roles, and encourage the Syrian parties to find a progressive solution that is in line with reality and addresses the concerns of the parties by adhering to the Syrian-led and Syrian-owned process and implementing Council resolution 2254 (2015). We hope the discussions on the creation of a Syrian constitutional committee, facilitated by Special Envoy De Mistura, will serve as a new starting point for launching the political process. That places a burden on all parties concerned to meet one another halfway and contribute together to that end.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I want to convey my country's profound condolences, sympathy and friendship to the people of the United States on this very significant day, and underline the importance of standing shoulder to shoulder in the quest for peace.

First, I would like to thank the Russian representative for his briefing, which is very timely.

Last week, during and after the meeting we expressed our alarm over the signs of a possible military offensive in north-western Syria, as it would risk leading to catastrophic humanitarian consequences, which are avoidable and must be avoided. We are deeply concerned, however, by the recent escalation of violence on the part of Syria and Russia in Idlib and surrounding areas. We reiterate that all parties in Syria must respect their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect civilians and civilian objects and to comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality and avoidance of unnecessary suffering.

We have said before and repeat now that Idlib is different from other areas as there is nowhere to flee. There are 3 million civilians living there, including many children and internally displaced persons. Idlib is a de-escalation area established by the Astana guarantors, and that is why we all looked to their meeting last Friday with some hope. It is key that they step up efforts to immediately implement their own de-escalation agreement in Idlib, ensure humanitarian access and the protection of civilians, and avoid further military escalation.

It is urgent for them to act now to avoid the enormous humanitarian catastrophe that would unfold before our eyes in a large-scale military offensive. This is not hypothetical, as we have witnessed all de-escalation areas turning into escalation areas over the past year. The responsibility and ability to avoid a catastrophe and allow time for dialogue lies with Syria and Russia. The Council, however, should also explore all meaningful options to prevent military escalation and find a peaceful solution to Idlib, in accordance with international law.

Last Friday, Special Envoy De Mistura presented some ideas that merit consideration. We need to explore any concrete, meaningful suggestions and proposals over the coming days to ensure that the Council collectively shoulders its responsibility. We remain available to explore all options for preventive action by the Council. We reiterate our full support for the Special Envoy, including his efforts to swiftly establish a constitutional committee. A United Nations-facilitated political solution, in line with resolution 2254 (2015), is the only way to ensure a sustainable solution to the crisis, to end the suffering and to address the legitimate concerns of all Syrians.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): On this day, as we commemorate the tragic events of 11 September 2001, I once again convey my country's solidarity with the Government and the people of the United States.

My delegation thanks the Russian Federation for calling for this briefing, which sheds light on the conclusions of the third tripartite summit of the guarantors of the Astana process, held in Tehran on 7 September, which also addressed the situation in Idlib

province. The meeting took place in a context marked by concerns about the imminence of a large-scale offensive by the Syrian armed forces against the rebel strongholds in Idlib governorate.

Côte d'Ivoire has consistently expressed its disapproval of the use of force by any actor and has reiterated, along with all observers of the Syrian conflict, that such an armed confrontation would cause an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe in a province that is home to some 3 million people, more than half of whom are internally displaced. Those fears are compoumded by the threat of the use of chemical weapons, for which the belligerents are already denying responsibility.

In the context of growing tensions, the Tehran meeting was a real source of hope both for the people of Idlib and for the international community. Unfortunately, it does not seem to have provided reassuring answers to concerns about the fate of Idlib province, in particular with regard to the protection of civilians and the humanitarian repercussions of the conflict, the Astana guarantors having insisted only on the need to combat "terrorism and the right of Damascus to recover its entire territory".

The numerous calls for restraint by the Security Council and the international community did not prevent the recent escalation of violence, which, according to the spokesman for the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Mr. David Swanson, resulted in the displacement of more than 30,000 people. Again according to OCHA, between 1 and 9 September 30,542 women, children and men were displaced from the south and south-west of Idlib, as well as from the north and north-west of neighbouring Hama province.

Côte d'Ivoire remains convinced that there is still time to give peace a chance. It therefore urges all parties involved to immediately implement a ceasefire and to pursue negotiations, in the spirit of resolution 2254 (2015), in order to prevent an even larger humanitarian tragedy in Syria.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): This morning's meeting coincides with the commemoration of the terrorist attacks that took place on 11 September 2001, claiming thousands of innocent victims among the friendly American people. We would like to convey once again our condolences to the American people and the families of the victims, and to express our solidarity with them on this day. We also reiterate our commitment to working with our partners and allies to eliminate the scourge of terrorism, which threatens international peace and security. We too pledge to pursue our efforts as a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham.

I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his briefing to the Security Council on the outcome of the summit held in Tehran on Friday among the Astana guarantors. The summit addressed the situation in Syria generally and in Idlib specifically. In that regard, we call on the parties concerned to pursue the dialogue process at all levels in order to reach a peaceful resolution to the situation in Idlib.

The State of Kuwait reiterates what we have noted in previous meetings, namely, that any military escalation in Idlib would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. It is the most vulnerable of the society — women, children, the elderly and the sick — who would pay the heaviest price. We have seen what happened in other parts of Syria, some of which were designated de-escalation zones.

We have closely followed the recent reports of some international organizations on the situation in Idlib and the surrounding areas. We would like to voice our deep concern in the light of the information that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has reported on the displacement of more than 30,000 persons from Idlib during the past few days as a result of the recent escalation there.

We also followed the press conference that the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock, held yesterday in Geneva, during which he called upon the international community to address the crisis in a way that would prevent Idlib in the months ahead from becoming the worst humanitarian catastrophe, with the heaviest loss of lives, in the twenty-first century. I reiterate that warning by saying that if a comprehensive military operation were to take place in Idlib, which must draw the attention of the Security Council, then we would indeed face the worst humanitarian catastrophe, with the heaviest loss of lives, in the twenty-first century.

We remind all parties of the need to honour their commitments under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and to uphold the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, as well as of the protection of civilians

and civilian sites. Military attacks targeting groups categorized as terrorist groups by the Security Council absolutely do not give any party to the conflict cause to violate its obligations under international law. Let us remember that wars have rules, and that in Idlib there is one terrorist for every 100 civilians, most of whom are women and children.

We reiterate our support to for Secretary-General António Guterres, who in a statement of 29 August, urgently appealed to the Syrian Government and all parties concerned to exercise restraint. He also called on the Astana guarantors to step up efforts to find a peaceful solution to the situation in Idlib and to devote more time and attention to diplomatic efforts in order to avoid further bloodshed. In this context, we hope that the meetings held today and yesterday in Geneva by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, will find ways to save the lives of innocent civilians.

This is the fourth meeting that we have held on Syria in less than one week. We hope that these meetings will draw attention to Idlib and contribute to sustaining the diplomatic efforts of us all in order to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe and maintain the commitment to implementing Security Council resolutions, including resolution 2401 (2018), which calls for a ceasefire, for humanitarian aid to reach those who are in need, and for the protection of civilians and health-care an ' civilian facilities. We hope that the messages that come out of our meetings will reach the parties concerned and make them aware that the Security Council will closely follow the situation in Idlib and is ready to take the measures necessary to shoulder its humanitarian and legal responsibilities towards the inhabitants of Idlib.

In conclusion, we underscore once again that the best and most sustainale solution to the Syrian crisis is a political solution under the auspices of the United Nations and in line with resolution 2254 (2015) and the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): Our hearts still go out to all the victims and families of the unforgettable and unforgivable terrorist attack of 9/11. We send our prayers and profound condolences to all those families that lost loved ones at the World Trade Center. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, people all over the world, including Kazakhstan, stood shoulder to shoulder in mourning, solidarity, sympathy and friendship with the people of the United States. This day is not only to commemorate but also to make sure that it never happens again anywhere else in the world. Our resolve, collective effort and unity against terrorism is the way forward.

We thank the delegation of the Russian Federation for initiating this open briefing to discuss the outcome of the Tehran summit, which has great implications for the current phase of the Syrian crisis. Kazakhstan welcomes the trilateral summit of the Heads of the guarantor countries of the Astana process in Tehran, which resulted in the adoption of a joint statement and further cooperation among the three countries to resolve the Syrian crisis.

As we know, the guarantor States of the Astana process — Russia, Iran and Turkey — have met for the third time, with very constructive outcomes of a turning point for the Syrian people. The summit was held under the common understanding of the unacceptability of any provocations. The Heads of the guarantor States also confirmed the commitment to preserving the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria. The summit also clearly demonstrated the positive role of the Astana process in coordinating international activities related to the Syrian peace process, including preserving the political unity and integrity of the country.

We welcome the most notable parts of the text, referring to cooperation against terrorist groups such as Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and Al-Qaida, and the importance of distinguishing between terrorists and armed opposition groups participating in the ceasefire. The statement also emphasizes the political process, the creation of a constitutional committee, humanitarian assistance, the repatriation of asylum-seekers and the organization of an international conference on refugees and internally displaced persons. Kazakhstan believes that this will contribute to the final formation of a constitutional committee and undoubtedly have a positive impact on the political processes and preparations to hold free elections in Syria.

The summit proved once again that urgent international tasks can be solved only on the basis of respect, trust and constructive cooperation. My delegation notes with satisfaction that a ceasefire in Idlib was facilitated, thereby creating new opportunities for the political process. In that vein, we are convinced that the world community should direct its joint efforts

towards creating the conditions for the settlement of the intra-Syrian conflict by exclusively peaceful means, rebuilding the ruined country and addressing the complex humanitarian situation. We also need to support the creation of conditions for the return of numerous Syrian refugees. In that regard, the idea of convening an international conference on Syrian refugees could be a first step towards a collective solution of the problem.

Kazakhstan commends Moscow, Tehran and Ankara for their agreement to exert all efforts to protect the population and improve the humanitarian situation, in particular by restoring the economy and infrastructure to address acute social problems. Another important point was the emphasis on the political process, conveying that there is no military solution to the crisis and the parties concerned should sit down at the negotiating table.

It would be wrong to suggest that the trilateral summit produced an ultimate formula to resolve the Idlib crisis. We are sure that the unresolved issues will take time and further efforts to settle. In that context, we look forward to the next meeting of the guarantor countries of the Astana process in Moscow to discuss all issues related to the recent developments on the ground.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We reiterate our solidarity with the United States and the families of the thousands of victims claimed by the evil hands of terrorism on 9/11 — a phenomenon against which we stand united.

We appreciate the convening of this meeting and the statement delivered by the representative of the Russian Federation on the meeting held by the guarantors of the Astana process in the city of Tehran. We take careful note of the information provided, as well as of the joint statement issued by the Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey. In that regard, we welcome the ongoing cooperation among the Astana guarantors and underline the need for them to prevent a new escalation of violence and suffering in Idlib.

We must nevertheless express our alarm and regret at the intensification of the attacks in recent days, which have resulted in numerous fatalities, new internally displaced persons and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. All of that must cease.

Peru condemns terrorism and believes that terrorist groups must be held accountable for the crimes they have committed. We also recognize the right of the Syrian Government to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity, but we stress that in no case does that justify new massacres of civilians.

We believe that the Astana guarantors, because of their influence on the ground, have a special responsibility in the current delicate scenario, all the more so when Idlib is one of the de-escalation zones agreed upon by those guarantors.

We commend the tireless work of Mr. De Mistura in bringing the parties together and finding a way to avoid a new humanitarian tragedy. We support in particular his proposal to promote an effective separation between civilians and terrorists. We recognize that is a highly complex task, but we believe we must commit to it.

We hope that the meeting held yesterday among the Special Envoy and the Astana guarantors and the one to be held this week with the other countries involved in the Syrian crisis will lead to firm commitments to the political process based on resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex).

We would like to commend the valuable efforts being made by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its staff to provide a humanitarian response in such difficult circumstances.

We conclude by stressing the need for the Council to send a strong message to the international community that it will not tolerate impunity with regard to the continuing violations of international law and international humanitarian law. The Council cannot once again be a mere bystander in the face of scenes of horror. It is our chief responsibility to prevent those tragedies and to protect the civilian population.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurnational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We join in commemorating and in expressing our condolences and solidarity to the people of the United States and to the relatives of those persons who lost their lives in the 11 September 2001 attacks. The fight against terrorism is a task that is shared by the entire international community.

We would like to thank the United States presidency of the Security Council for convening this important meeting. We thank the Russian delegation for the briefing it provided on the outcome of the tripartite meeting of the Astana guarantors that took place in Iran on 7 September. Having listened very carefully to that briefing, we feel compelled to reiterate our hope that

the violence in this conflict, which has raged for more than eight years, can be reduced across Syria, especially in densely populated areas. We therefore welcome the meeting held in Tehran and its joint outcome statement, because it served to confirm support for the provisions of the Astana agreement, which led to the establishment of crucial de-escalation zones, which we view as one of the international initiatives that have helped to reduce violence and facilitate peace and stability in Syria.

We call on the parties to work towards the full implementation of resolution 2401 (2018) and highlight the local agreements that contributed to reducing violence and that allowed for the evacuation of persons in need, including persons belonging to armed groups and their families, and facilitated the entry of humanitarian assistance. We hope that those agreements will continue to be upheld in order to allow the civilian population to return to their places of origin. We recall that any return must be voluntary, unhindered, in full dignity and in safe conditions.

Against that backdrop, we believe that the common denominator in this conflict must be adoption of measures to reduce violence on the ground, to build confidence among the parties, to alleviate humanitarian suffering and to advance initiatives, such as those previously mentioned, aimed at finding a political and peaceful solution to the conflict in general. However, the current priority is to take measures to protect the 2.9 million civilians who live in Idlib province and the surrounding areas. We eagerly await the outcomes of yesterday and today's meetings, which are taking place in Geneva, among Special Envoy Staffan De Mistura and the Astana guarantors.

We believe that any effort undertaken or any measure taken within the framework of resolution 2401 (2018) aimed at combating terrorist groups designated by the Security Council or armed groups in order to separate them from the civilian population must also take into consideration the protection of civilian lives within the context of international law. Along the same lines, we believe the political process needs to be bolstered on the basis of the Sochi outcome document and the establishment of a constitutional committee, a process that needs to be facilitated by the United Nations within the framework of the Geneva process and in accordance with the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015). We recall that the principles agreed upon in the Sochi statement do not only reinforce the political process, but they also serve to defend and uphold the rule of law and respect for people's rights and to combat the threat of terrorism and violent extremism, which lead to terrorism.

We emphasize that the Tehran meeting served to foster dialogue aimed at promoting the protection of civilians and the provision of humanitarian assistance to them, including the 6.2 million internally displaced persons throughout Syria and specifically the 1.4 million who are located in Idlib province. We underscore the initiative to convene an international conference on Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as the need to keep the issue of the release of detainees and the identification of missing persons on the agenda.

Finally, we express our rejection of any attempt to fragment Syria or to divide it along sectarian lines. On the contrary, in accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of that country, we insist that the conflict in Syria has no military solution and that the only way to resolve it is through an inclusive political process of dialogue and consensus, led by and for the Syrian people, that allows for a peaceful and lasting solution to the current situation.

Mr. Radomski (Poland): As we commemorate today the anniversary of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, I would like to join others in conveying our deepest condolences to the families of the victims of those attacks and our solidarity with the American people. The vivid memories of this day 17 years ago, which was especially important in this city, New York, should unify all of us in the fight against terrorism.

I thank you, Madam President, for convening this meeting, and I thank Russia for its important briefing.

Poland is deeply concerned about the current developments in Syria, in particular with regard to the escalation of hostilities in Idlib province, resulting in new displacement during the past few days of over 30,000 women, children and men and scores of civilian deaths. That region is one of the de-escalation zones in Syria, established and overseen by the guarantors of the Astana process with a view to assuring a ceasefire and humanitarian access, in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law.

The most recent escalation is again impacting civilians in a dramatic way. Poland shares the fears that the worst may be ahead of us. The safety and protection of approximately 2.9 million civilians residing in Idlib

and the surrounding areas is at risk. That includes about 1.4 million internally displaced persons, the majority of whom are women and children who came to the region from other areas

We are deeply alarmed by the fact that the ceasefire-related commitments and obligations are not respected by the Astana guarantors. We are disappointed that the meeting of the guarantors in Tehran ended without tangible conclusions. We call on Russia, Iran and Turkey, as well as on other actors with influence on the ground, to redouble their efforts in order to protect the civilian population of Idlib. In that context, the reported attacks on targets in Idlib that were carried out this past weekend are highly disquieting.

Any use of force, even against pockets of terrorists, cannot justify indiscriminate attacks on innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure, including medical and educational facilities. It will be civilians — innocent men, women and children — who will bear the brunt of hostilities if the scenario of an extensive military operation plays out in Idlib governorate. All sides must fully respect and comply with the principles of international humanitarian law, particularly with respect to the protection of civilians.

Let me stress the responsibility of the Council to prevent this potential tragedy. We cannot lose time and must act now in order to avoid mass casualties and yet another wave of displacement. The parties involved in Syria must take all the necessary steps to ensure the cessation of fighting, adequate protection for the Syrian people and, finally, urgent humanitarian access to Idlib and the necessary medical evacuations. We would also like to reiterate that refugees need to be provided with an opportunity affording them a safe, free and dignified return to their homes. A major military operation in Idlib governorate may hinder that goal, and consequently create a new wave of refugees. Furthermore, civilians who feel that their lives are at risk during the conflict must be able to leave freely at any time. Such movement must always be based on the free choice of each and every individual.

In conclusion, let me stress once again that there is no military solution to the conflict. Any attempt to bring peace by force will be counterproductive to achieving an inclusive and credible political process under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I begin my statement by expressing our solidarity and that of our Government to the Government and the people of the United States of America and the families of those who heroically died as a result of the barbaric terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and other sites in the country, which we are commemorating on today's anniversary. We convey to you, Ambassador Haley, our most sincere sympathy.

My delegation is grateful for the convening of this meeting, justified by the intense international attention that Idlib has drawn and the urgent need for a coordinated response so as to avoid an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. We are grateful to the Russian Federation for its briefing and to the three Astana guarantors who, in holding the third trilateral summit in Tehran, have become key actors in coordination efforts and political and security cooperation at the regional and international levels. The Government of Equatorial Guinea has taken note of the joint statement issued following the summit in Tehran, in the light of which my delegation would like to make the following comments.

We gratefully welcome the commitment of the Astana guarantors to continue cooperating to eradicate all persons, groups, enterprises and entities designated as terrorists in Syria by the Security Council. That position fully corresponds to that of the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, which is firmly opposed to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Moreover, the resolve and commitment of the guarantors to not prioritize a military solution to the conflict and advocate for a negotiated political process is to be commended. We believe that it is essential that those two key provisions of the joint statement be ensured and realized on the ground. That is predicated upon all national and international parties abstaining from military operations, which could transform Idlib governorate into the target of intense bombings. At this past Friday's briefing (see S/PV.8345), we all were in agreement in stressing the grave consequences that a fierce military offensive would have for that area.

It is true that we must combat active terrorists in order to restore peace and stability to Syria. As the Iranian Chair pointed out at the summit, however, that must be done without causing suffering for the civilian population with a scorched-earth policy. While there seems to be no obvious military solution to neutralize the Idlib jihadists, it is also clear that a destructive offensive should not be considered as the appropriate response. Even if such an offensive succeeded in defeating those groups on the battlefield, the jihadist

threat would remain. We saw that scenario play out last year in the Euphrates Valley region following the territorial victory over and retaking of the city of Deir ez-Zor by the Syrian army from militias from the Islamic State. Remaining elements of jihadist militias can continue waging an asymmetrical war in Syria and beyond its borders in areas not under the control of the region's Governments. I therefore echo the words of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, who stated recently:

> "Let us try to avoid that the last, probably major, battle of the Syrian territorial conflict end in a bloodbath. We ask all countries to maintain moral pressure to avoid a drastic military option in Idlib and provide additional time for negotiations".

In that regard, we express our optimism regarding the meetings that the Special Envoy held yesterday and today with representatives of the Astana guarantors with a view towards negotiations to pave the way towards peace and the possibility of finding alternative solutions for ending the impasse and the armed conflict in Syria through the implementation of a Syrian-led, inclusive constitutional committee.

While plans to combat armed and terrorist factions in Idlib remain on the drawing table, the priority of the Security Council must continue to focus on the protection of the civilian population, of which almost 3 million people are already displaced and have no place to go.

Ms. Guadey (Ethiopia): Allow me, Madam President, first of all, to take this opportunity to express our solidarity with the Government and the people of the United States on this day, which marks the commemoration of the tragic events of 11 September. My country was among the first to face the scourges of terrorism and knows at first-hand its devastating effects. We in Ethiopia in particular cannot forget to commemorate that horrific event, as it unfortunately coincides with the celebration of the Ethiopian New Year. Our thoughts and prayers will forever remain with the victims and their families.

We thank the delegation of Russia for its briefing on the outcome of the Astana summit. The importance of that meeting was clearly underscored last week in its role to finding a sustainable solution to the Idlib situation (see S/PV.8345). With the civilian casualties being reported, we continue to remain concerned about the humanitarian situation in Idlib. As we have stated repeatedly, further military escalation in Idlib could aggravate the humanitarian crisis and negatively affect the humanitarian assistance programme upon which millions of people depend for their existence.

We note that Iran, Russia and Turkey have agreed to continue their trilateral coordination and decided to address the Idlib situation in a spirit of cooperation according, to the joint statement issued following the summit. Conditions on the ground are difficult and require urgent and coordinated action. It is vital that the Astana guarantors continue to abide by the de-escalation agreement and find a sustainable solution that would protect civilians and civilian facilities. Facilitating safe, rapid, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access remains critical to ensuring that the United Nations and its humanitarian partners are able to deliver aid to all in need.

The joint statement also underlined the fact that, in the fight against terrorism, the separation of United Nations-listed terrorists from the armed opposition would be of the utmost importance. In that regard, the proposal that Special Envoy De Mistura presented on Friday could be considered positively, with the objective of ensuring the safety of civilians and civilian infrastructure. We hope that this will be discussed in the ongoing consultations with the Astana guarantors in Geneva.

Finally, we stress that there is no military solution to the Syrian crisis. Hence, all Syrian parties and those States with influence should engage in and support the continued efforts of the Special Envoy to establish and launch the constitutional committee. Ultimately, it is a Syrian-owned and Syrian-led political dialogue, facilitated by the United Nations, that could sustainably address the suffering of the Syrians.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I join my colleagues in expressing our condolences and solidarity with you, Madam President, your Mission, all our American friends and the citizens of this great city of New York for the losses of 9/11, and to all those countries that, like my own, lost their own nationals in the attacks. Speaking as someone who worked very closely with the American and other Governments in the aftermath of 9/11, I can say that I will never forget that day and that we will never cease to stand alongside them in the fight against terrorists and the unwavering campaign to protect our societies and defend civilians.

The attacks of 9/11 came without warning out of the clear blue sky. The horror of Syria has been unfolding

before us for more than six slow years. After 9/11, Russia and Iran worked with us. We urge them to work with us now to halt the attacks and protect the civilians of Idlib. There have been many inflection points that have come and gone on Syria. The Astana meeting, one would like to think, was another inflection point that would succeed. I think that it is very important that we can have this discussion and this debate today. We will soon hear from our Turkish colleague, whom we welcome to the Council.

But I want to stay right at the start that we strongly agree with President Erdoğan. This morning, he wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that Al-Assad's solution to countering terrorism is a false one. He said that the plan to militarily attack Idlib will only create new hotbeds of terrorism. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham was an outcome and not the cause of what is happening in Syria.

We face a choice between an Al-Assad/Russia military assault on Idlib in which, as many colleagues have said today, thousands of civilians will die — we have seen in eastern Aleppo and eastern Ghouta what that looks like: the killing of children; attacks on schools and hospitals, even those in deconflicted areas; the barbaric use of chemical weapons — or allowing Turkey and opposition groups the support, space and time to separate out the terrorists and tackle them themselves. Turkey has a plan for Idlib, and it involves reaching an agreement with the Syrian opposition whereby the regime would refrain from attacking them while they combat terrorism. That is what we should be discussing today, but I think it was absent from the briefing we received from Russia just now.

We would like also to talk about how we can get together, through Astana or another grouping that works, to work out how the regime can work with the opposition to bring security and stability back to Idlib. I would like to know why the Council cannot spend time discussing how to build on the work of Astana to that end. This would not only provide a plan to rid the area of extremists, but would also provide the beginnings of a model for discussing a political process to resolve this conflict, which has gone on too long.

Every speaker today has talked about the importance of there being no alternative to a political solution. Of course we agree with that, but the United Nations Special Envoy has told us that progress on a political solution is impossible if there is a military assault on Idlib, so I would like to know from Russia and Iran that they will heed those words, that they will stop the military operations, and that they will come to the Council and discuss with all of us, including Turkey, how exactly we can build on Astana to engage seriously in order to finally — six years after some of the worst horrors we have seen in war since the Second World War — bring that to an end and get a political process under way in Syria. I will be grateful to hear from Russia and Iran how exactly we can bring that about.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I want to start, obviously, by thanking all Council members for their heartfelt condolences and wishes. They are my brothers and sisters, and I think that is why, when we speak about something like Syria, we are all very passionate about it. We know what pain feels like, we know what suffering is and we get frustrated when we see things happening that we cannot control.

This meeting was called for the purpose of discussing the Astana talks for a peaceful solution in Syria. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the prospects for a diplomatic solution in Syria, but let us not waste time with the disinformation, distractions and outright lies that the Al-Assad regime and its Russian and Iranian partners constantly use to distort this conversation. Let us talk about the facts on the ground in Syria.

This month already, the world has seen a clear military escalation in Idlib. The Russian and Al-Assad regime air forces have launched over 100 air strikes. They are using barrel bombs, rockets and artillery. They are targeting hospitals and medical facilities. They are conducting ruthless double-tap strikes on civilian volunteers like the White Helmets. For those listening who have not heard of double-tap strikes, that is when pro-regime forces strike an area, wait a few moments for first responders to arrive and then strike again. It is a disgusting tactic of terrorists, not professional soldiers.

According to the United Nations, over 30,000 people have already been displaced by ongoing air strikes. We have heard a lot of talk today, but we have not seen any actions to indicate that Russia, Iran and Al-Assad are interested in a political solution. All we have seen are the actions of cowards interested in a bloody military conquest of Idlib. Turkey learned that lesson last week when it met with Russia and Iran. Turkey wanted them to agree to a ceasefire in Idlib,

but Russia and Iran rejected Turkey's request and the Al-Assad regime continued its brutal attacks.

The United States is long past taking Russia and Iran at their word that they are interested in protecting civilians in Idlib from further violence. No matter what type of weapons or methods are used, the United States strongly opposes any escalation of violence in Idlib. Every member of the Security Council should feel the same. It is time for Russia to stop wasting our time when it comes to peace in Syria. Russia and Iran have had every opportunity to demonstrate their credibility as constructive actors in Syria. But what have they done with these opportunities? They created so-called de-escalation zones throughout Syria, which they have cynically, systematically and ruthlessly violated. In February, they violated the de-escalation zone in eastern Ghouta. In July, Russia blatantly broke a commitment made by President Putin and President Trump to upholding a ceasefire arrangement in south-western Syria. Now, In Idlib, Russia and Iran are violating their last remaining so-called de-escalation zone.

These are not the actions of good-faith parties of peace. This is not how you demonstrate your commitment to protecting civilian lives, and this is not how you convince the United States and other countries to fund reconstruction efforts in Syria. I repeat that it would be absurd for the United States and other countries to consider the demands from Russia and its allies that the rest of the world should fund reconstruction efforts in Syria as Russian air strikes pummel Idlib in an escalation of a new military assault. Russia, Iran and Al-Assad are demolishing Idlib and asking us to call it peace. But the reality is that Astana has failed. It has failed to stop the violence or to promote a political solution.

We will know that the Al-Assad regime and its enablers are serious about a political process for peace in Syria not when they repeat empty promises but when the violence stops; when the air strikes and the ground offensives stop; when they allow the United Nations to deliver life-saving humanitarian aid to civilians and allow them the freedom of movement to escape the impending siege; when they work with us to pursue real terrorists, not to create more of them by targeting innocent civilians; when we see irreversible progress made through the United Nations-led Geneva talks to reach a political transition in line with resolution 2254 (2015); and when we see Iran's influence over events in Syria completely extinguished. We will not allow Iran, through the facade of the Astana process, to hijack the future of the Syrian people. Iran's role and Al-Assad's murderous attacks on civilians will not be ignored by the United States and the rest of the international community.

I would also like to reiterate what I said last week to the Al-Assad regime and anyone else contemplating the use of chemical weapons in Syria (see S/PV.8345). The United States followed through when I said that it would respond to the use of chemical weapons. We stand by that warning. Russia has the power to stop the catastrophe looming in Idlib. It has the power to stop the killing. It still has the power to match its words of peace with deeds by working in Geneva to achieve a political transition in Syria. We consider any assault on Idlib to be a reckless escalation of the conflict. If Al-Assad, Russia and Iran continue along the same path, the consequences will be dire. The world will hold them responsible and no number of Security Council meetings will change that.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

The representative of the Russian Federation has asked to make a further statement.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have listened carefully to the discussion today. We have just as much interest in it as the other member States of the Security Council. Many people today have asked us to reveal our plans for Idlib. We too would like the coalition to share its plans for Syria with us, but frankly neither the plans announced by high-level representatives of the coalition members or those expressed during today's meeting give us much hope. We have heard concrete threats against both a sovereign State and Russia that, incidentally, are actually not directly linked to the possible use of chemical weapons.

When we discussed that issue here in the Chamber on Friday, I could see that nuances in how our Western partners expressed their positions had appeared. The alarm bells sounded with the statement of the principle that force could be used against the sovereign State of the Syrian Arab Republic in response not just to the alleged use of chemical weapons but also to the launch of a military operation in Idlib. I would like to ask you, Madam President, not to try to swap these terms. We are talking about an anti-terrorist operation in Idlib, not a military operation. There have been constant references to the de-escalation zones, but I want to once again

emphasize that they were intended to be temporary, not something that would be there forever. Sooner or later, they were to be replaced by local truces, and where that did not occur, by anti-terrorist operations. That is what has happened in other de-escalation areas now under the control of the Syrian authorities and to which Syrian civilians are now returning.

Both today and on Friday, I have also seen something else, which is that some of my colleagues have been stubbornly trying to divide the Astana guarantors. They will not succeed. Some of them would very much like the Astana process to collapse, and my American colleague said that the process has failed. Perhaps you would like that, Madam President, but I must disappoint you, because the Astana process is ongoing. And I am sure that with its help we will achieve tangible results in Syria.

I have said it before and I will say it again. Everything that is going on, and all the invocations we have heard about Idlib, are not so much out of concern for the civilian population there — and, incidentally, whose existence we are also aware of and about which we are no less concerned than you, Madam President — as they are attempts to find any way possible to preserve the last major terrorist enclave in Syria and thereby prevent the Syrian Government from regaining full control of its own territory. We continue to call on you to drop these attempts and work on the real process of reaching a political settlement. And you can be certain that we are in close contact both with our partners in the Astana process and with those who are in control of the situation on the ground in Idlib, so that we can prevent the civilian population from suffering as a result of an anti-terrorist operation as much as we possibly can.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I would like to express my condolences to the families and friends of the victims of terrorism today.

The recent tripartite summit in Tehran took place at a critical juncture. The Presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey, pleased with the contribution that the Astana format has made to peace, security and stability in Syria, discussed the way forward to durable peace in the country. They conveyed a clear message through their joint statement, reaffirming their continued strong commitment to Syria's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, which are every State's inherent right, and Syria is no exception to that. They should be strictly respected by all. The three Presidents rejected all attempts to create a new reality on the ground under the pretext of combating terrorism. That explicit and clear-cut message must be heard. As a victim of chemical weapons itself, Iran condemns in the strongest possible terms any use of such weapons by anyone, any time and anywhere. At the same time, we warn against any attacks, including under the pretext of the alleged use of such weapons by the Syrian Government. At a time when Syria has destroyed all of its chemical weapons under international supervision, such allegations are mere fabrications in an attempt to use force against it, and any such attempt would only further complicate the situation.

Another clear and strong message from the summit is that the Presidents are determined to continue their cooperation in eliminating all terrorists, including Da'esh, the Al-Nusra Front and all other individuals, groups, undertakings and entities associated with Al-Qaida or Da'esh, which have been designated as terrorists by the Council. Of course, that must be done while preventing civilian casualties. That is why the Presidents reaffirmed their determination to work towards protecting civilians. As President Rouhani stressed at the Tehran summit, combating terrorism requires a comprehensive approach by taking into account all aspects of this unpleasant phenomenon. From that perspective, the fight against terrorism in Idlib is an integral part of the mission of restoring peace and stability to Syria, but that fight must not hurt civilians.

Likewise, improving the humanitarian situation by facilitating rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access to all Syrians in need was highlighted.

Those will be guiding principles with respect to ongoing efforts to combat terrorists in Idlib.

Precisely for that reason, the Presidents underlined the utmost importance of separating terrorists and the armed opposition groups that joined, or will join, the ceasefire regime.

Another concrete message of the Tehran summit was that the Syrian conflict can end only through a negotiated political process.

Against that backdrop, the Presidents stressed the need for, and their resolve to cooperate in, advancing

a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political process. The right to determine the future of Syria belongs exclusively to Syrians. To that end, cooperation towards establishing and launching the work of a constitutional committee is critical.

Parallel to such efforts, conducive conditions should be prepared for the safe and voluntary return of all refugees and internally displaced persons. That will undoubtedly contribute to the ceasefire and national dialogue and accelerate the reconciliation process. To that end, convening an international conference on Syrian refugees and internally displaced persons is important.

While Syria is passing through a critical stage in defeating terrorists and regaining its unity and territorial integrity, the international community should stand firm in breathing new life into the country. As the Islamic Republic of Iran supported Syria to defeat terrorists, so will it play its constructive role in bringing peace and prosperity to the country.

Finally, with regard to the references made to my country by the representative of the United States, I should reiterate that Iran was invited by Syria to fight terrorists. However, the United States military operations in Syria are illegal and an act of aggression. They are against the Charter of the United Nations and should come to an end.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Sinirlioğlu (Turkey): At the outset, I also would like to pay homage to the memory of the victims of 9/11. Our thoughts and prayers are with their families. We should never forget that tragic day or lower our guard, and should always remain united in the fight against terrorism.

The Permanent Representatives of the Russian Federation and Iran briefed the Security Council about the Tehran summit held on 7 September. Upon instructions from my Government, I also would like to share my country's views on the outcome of the summit and our position on the developments in Idlib.

The Astana format was created in order to help reduce violence across Syria and give impetus to the political process. The importance of maintaining our joint efforts to end the conflict in Syria through a political solution were reconfirmed in the Astana meetings. The most concrete outcome of the format has been the establishment of the de-escalation zones. The Idlib de-escalation zone, as a case in point, has dramatically reduced violence in the province.

Idlib was the main agenda item at the Tehran summit. The leaders agreed that the situation in Idlib should be addressed in line with the principles and the spirit of cooperation that characterized the Astana format. Those shared principles, such as the preservation of the territorial integrity of Syria and the need to find a political solution to the conflict, are crucial for our efforts to succeed in Idlib and elsewhere in Syria.

At the summit, President Erdoğan underlined the need to preserve the de-escalation zone and called for an immediate and complete ceasefire in Idlib. The ceasefire, as highlighted by our Minister of Defence yesterday, should include all air and ground attacks. There can be no arbitrary hierarchy of death. While condemning and warning against chemical attacks, we cannot overlook the use of conventional weapons, which continue to cause massive casualties. Our calls for an immediate ceasefire include all military operations, and Turkey will continue to work on that basis. We invite the international community to vocally and actively support our efforts to that end.

As pointed out by the members of the Security Council, there is no doubt that an all-out military operation would result in a major humanitarian catastrophe. Such an operation would trigger a massive wave of refugees and tremendous security risks for Turkey, the rest of Europe and beyond. With all our generosity, we have gone to extraordinary lengths to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people, including hosting approximately 3.5 million refugees, more than any other country in the world. But let us face it: we long ago exceeded the limits of our capacity.

We simply cannot allow a fait accompli in Idlib that would endanger the lives of millions of innocent civilians. That is our collective duty as the international community. Today the people who are watching us with worry in Idlib are not terrorists, but rather 3.5 million civilians, 1 million of whom are children. We must not fail them.

The Syrian regime seeks to legitimize its operation on counter-terrorism grounds. Let us make no mistake: such an operation would not achieve the stated goal. In a complex place like Idlib, traditional counter-terrorism methods would not yield the desired results. On the contrary, they would create further suffering

and alienate and radicalize more Syrians. In that sense, a military operation in Idlib would only play into the hands of terrorists.

Only a viable ceasefire would allow the creation of an environment to effectively fight terrorism. That entails employing approaches that require time and patience. That is what Turkey has been working towards achieving through its separation efforts in Idlib. In order for our efforts to succeed, guarantees must be given to civilians and moderate opposition groups that they will not be targeted once they separate from terrorists. That is the underlying objective of the call for a ceasefire by President Erdoğan.

In line with the Astana memorandum, Turkey established 12 observation posts in the Idlib de-escalation zone. Our observation posts have prevented violations. Our presence has also contributed to creating conditions for separating terrorists from moderate opposition groups.

Furthermore, Turkey has been at the forefront in the fight against terrorism, and we are resolved to combat that scourge without discriminating among terrorist groups. We have reinstated stability and calm in the areas we cleared from terrorists in Syria. We are pleased to observe that hundreds of thousands of Syrians have voluntarily returned to their homeland and that a responsible approach to counter-terrorism can indeed win hearts and minds.

There should be no illusion: there can be no military victory in Syria. A military solution cannot bring about any legitimacy, or create a lasting settlement. Legitimacy can be achieved only through a negotiated political solution. The United Nations-led Geneva process remains the main venue to that end, in line with the resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). And the situation in Idlib will be decisive for the fate of the political process.

At the Tehran summit, the three guarantors reaffirmed their resolve to continue joint efforts to advance the political process. They reiterated their commitment to help establish and launch a constitutional committee. In that framework, senior officials of the three guarantors are currently meeting Special Envoy de Mistura in Geneva to continue their discussions to start the committee's work. We attach the utmost importance to the establishment of a constitutional committee and creating the conditions for holding free and fair elections under United Nations supervision without further delay.

As President Erdoğan stated in his article in *The Wall Street Journal* yesterday,

> "Idlib is the last exit before the toll. If the international community, including Europe and the United States, fails to take action now, not only innocent Syrians but the entire world stands to pay the price. Turkey has done everything in its power to stop the bloodshed next door. To ensure that we succeed, the rest of the world must set aside narrow self-interest and throw its weight behind a political solution."

Today — with our partners in Astana, with the Council under this roof and with the overall international community — we face the moment of of truth in defence of the values we stand for.

The President: The representative of the United Kingdom has asked for the floor to make a further statement.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I will be brief, but I want to thank the Turkish representative for again setting out the Turkish plan. All of us have listened very carefully to the Astana briefers. We do not want to detract from the Astana efforts; we support any move that gets the political process under way. But we have heard only one plan today for trying to avert the bloodshed in Idlib and actually make a difference on the ground. I would urge all Security Council members to rally around the plan that our Turkish colleague has set out.

What worries me is that instead we have heard a narrative that restoring full Syrian control over its territory is synonymous with fighting terrorists. For the people of Idlib that is not the equation. The people of Idlib are going to suffer terribly if this military assault goes ahead. It is precisely for these situations that the doctrine of proportionality under international humanitarian law exists.

I therefore hope that the Council can come together over the coming days to talk further about how we can maximize the political process, building on Astana's efforts but as well having a very serious discussion about how we can avert an all-out military attack on the people of Idlib.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.